

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : Working Notes on First Day's Session
of Guam Conference

TIME : 1500-1730, 20 March 1967

PLACE : Conference Room, COMNAV/Marianas
Headquarters Building

PARTICIPANTS: See attached lists

THE PRESIDENT opened the session by welcoming the Vietnamese delegation and noting that one of the main objectives of the conference was to provide him with the opportunity to introduce to the Vietnamese representatives the new American team which would soon be taking over in Vietnam. He then introduced Ambassador Bunker, Ambassador Locke, and Mr. Robert Komer. During the course of these introductory remarks, THE PRESIDENT expressed high praise for Ambassador Lodge and the work he had done in Vietnam. THE PRESIDENT then stressed the importance of the constitutional process now in train in Vietnam and the drafting work of the Constituent Assembly. He also underlined the importance of the task of preparing for and holding elections which would give SVN a truly democratic government with a popular base. This stress on the constitutional and electoral process of nation-building set the tone and theme for the entire session.

General Thieu (Chairman of the National Leadership Council and South Vietnam's present Chief of State) opened the Vietnamese presentation. He thanked President Johnson warmly for the latter's initial remarks and his support for the cause of Vietnamese independence. General Thieu added that the trend of the war was now running in our favor. The enemy, frustrated in the military field, was shifting his emphasis to the political front. Gen. Thieu felt that in the military area stronger pressure ought to be put on North Vietnam in order to persuade the Hanoi regime to cease its aggression in South Vietnam. Gen. Thieu then turned to

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the substantial results and progress that had been achieved in Vietnam since the Honolulu conference, noting that his remarks would be general and that Prime Minister Ky would provide amplifying details. He called attention to the Constituent Assembly elections held in September 1966 and to the work of that assembly as tangible proof of the kind of progress that had been made. He said the drafting of the constitution had been completed and the constitution would be promulgated within a few weeks. He noted that elections for village and hamlet councils would be held next month (i.e., April), promised that SVN would have a popularly elected government by the fall of 1967, and that "by the end of this year" would be well on the road to constitutional democracy. Gen. Thieu then asked his prime minister, Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, to make a detailed report on the present situation and progress in South Vietnam.

General Ky also expressed his personal pleasure and that of his government at the opportunity to confer with the President of the United States and the President's advisers on the situation in Vietnam. The full text of Ky's remarks is separately available and hence those remarks will not be recapitulated in detail here. Ky spoke of national reconciliation, of Revolutionary Development and constitutional progress, proudly waving a copy of the final draft of the new constitution handed him a few hours before he boarded the plane for Guam. He said that document was "now as good as the law of the land." The theme and principal thrust of Ky's presentation is summarized in his statement, "We are going to do everything possible to make our nation whole again. We are striving to provide an atmosphere in which all our citizens can have respect for himself, his fellow citizen, and his government and its institutions." Taken in context, his comments about the Front (no coalition) and the need to keep pressure on Hanoi contained nothing a potential Vietnamese presidential candidate would not have had to say. They did not--as the press inaccurately reported--strike a jarring note out of harmony with American views. Ky concluded by paying tribute to

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the American soldier and by welcoming Ambassador Bunker, Ambassador Locke, and Mr. Komer to Vietnam.

THE PRESIDENT thanked Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky for their fine presentation of the situation in Vietnam and the progress being made there. He welcomed the Vietnamese achievements both in the military field and, particularly, in the field of nation-building. He stressed strongly the US Government's desire to see the pacification effort intensified. THE PRESIDENT also stressed the need for close military and civilian coordination--both US and Vietnamese-- in this all-important pacification effort.

General Cao Van Vien (GVN Minister of National Defense) then gave a briefing on the military situation in South Vietnam. He noted that the Communists were under increased pressure and were suffering battle-field defeats. The Viet Cong, he observed, were trying desperately to regain stature by local initiatives such as the attack made on 15 February in Quang Ngai Province. The Viet Cong were also steadily increasing their use of rockets, mortars, and recoilless rifles in an effort to inflict psychologically impressive damage on Vietnamese and allied forces. General Vien observed that over the ensuing weeks and months the Viet Cong (VC) will probably adopt a three-fold strategy involving:

(1) Increased attacks on Vietnamese and allied base camps and installations in order to increase GVN and allied commitments of troops to static defense duties.

(2) Increased attacks on Revolutionary Development teams because the Communists feel it essential to thwart these teams' effectiveness.

(3) Increased attacks on district and provincial headquarters in order to terrorize local Vietnamese leaders, generate political pressure, and thwart South Vietnamese political development.

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General Vien then presented a detailed view of current Republic of Vietnam and Free World armed forces' actions.

Following this, General Vien discussed the Vietnamese Army's wholehearted commitment to the support of the Revolutionary Development (RD) program, emphasizing that the GVN's military leaders completely understood this essential task. General Vien observed that the increasing level of attacks on RD teams proved that the RD effort was hurting the Communist cause and driving the VC to desperate measures.

General Vien stated that the primary mission of the Vietnamese and allied armed forces was three-fold:

- (1) To defeat the enemy's military force
- (2) To surge ahead in Revolutionary Development
- (3) To halt infiltration and the movement of men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam.

General Vien concluded his remarks with some specific comments on the infiltration problem, observing that the Communists could never be defeated so long as they were able to bring a continuing flow of supplies and manpower into the South. He noted that South Vietnam had a 935-mile border with Cambodia and Laos, a border that was ill-defined and impossible to make secure against infiltration. In order to stop this infiltration, the GVN had a specific proposal they wished to offer for American consideration, namely, that of placing forces along the alignment of Route 9 from the Vietnamese border to the Mekong River. The GVN was not proposing a Maginot Line, but, instead, a series of interlocking strong points created by an aggressive deployment of ground troops. The GVN recognized the political difficulties involved in this proposal and the problem it would create in regard to the 1962 Geneva agreement in Laos. Nevertheless,

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the GVN felt that it was a practical plan and noted that the Communists' use of Laotian territory itself constituted a complete violation of the 1962 agreements, and hence, an act of naked aggression which the Communists' opponents were perfectly justified in countering.*

THE PRESIDENT thanked General Vien for his review of the military situation and asked General Westmoreland if the latter had any additional comments to make.**

General Westmoreland added that the Communist enemy unquestionably had increasing problems. There was no evidence that the enemy's strategy was changing but his tactics were modified from time to time. His losses had doubled during the course of the preceding year. The enemy now had 54 maneuver battalions but only half of these were fully combat effective. Vietnamese and allied progress was obvious and was supported by much tangible evidence. For example, 18 percent more of SVN's road net was now open to daily traffic. Out of the entire ARVN, US advisers rate only seven battalions as not being fully combat effective at this time, and General Westmoreland was assured that this number would be reduced to zero in the near future. There was a steady and noticeable improvement in South Vietnamese combat leadership and performance. General Westmoreland also observed that there was a steady improvement

*Subsequent press comment indicated that General Vien was talking in terms of a five-division force, but my notes make no reference to specific numbers of troops and to the best of my recollection no mention of numbers was actually made in this context at the 20 March Joint Session.

**Both my notes and my memory indicate that the Vietnamese Route 9 proposal was not mentioned or discussed by any American speaker at the 20 March Joint Session.

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in the pacification situation, particularly in the area immediately around Saigon. There was, in short, much to be encouraged about. What was most needed now was still better positive work on our side coupled with even more pressure on the enemy.

THE PRESIDENT took up the theme of national reconciliation and the Vietnamese Government's program in this all-important sphere. He expressed his gratification at the fact that our Vietnamese allies manifestly felt the same urgency on this matter as did we.

THE PRESIDENT congratulated Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky on Vietnam's constitution and its successful completion. He expressed his personal appreciation at the sense of urgency obviously felt by Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky with regard to constitutional development.

THE PRESIDENT also welcomed the account of South Vietnam's progress toward elections. There followed an exchange of comments during which Ky again promised to move forward on elections with all possible speed, saying that he hoped the presidential and senatorial elections could be held by mid-August. THE PRESIDENT noted that his birthday was on August 27 and said he could ask for no finer birthday present than an elected president and senate in Vietnam.

THE PRESIDENT, again referring by name to the members of his new team, assured the Vietnamese delegation that the best men available in our country would be sent to help the Vietnamese people in their task of building a free nation. He also assured the Vietnamese that General Westmoreland would be given whatever he needed, wanted, and could use in the task of defeating the Communist enemy. The very best men who wore the uniform of the United States would be sent to Vietnam to help the Vietnamese defend their freedom.

THE PRESIDENT noted how fine it was to watch a democracy being built and how anxious the United States was to assist in this exciting task. THE PRESIDENT stressed the need for stability,

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complimenting the present Vietnamese leaders on the amount of stability they had brought to Vietnam during their period of trusteeship. He observed jovially that "you seem to be doing a better job of maintaining unity than I am," and used this well-received jest as a means for underlining the paramount importance of the Vietnamese military establishment's remaining unified.

THE PRESIDENT then again praised the work of Ambassador Lodge in helping the Vietnamese along their road to political democracy. He commented that he was going to ask Ambassador Lodge to become his ambassador-at-large so that the Ambassador could explain to the American people the fine things the Vietnamese were doing and so that his counsel would continue to be available.

THE PRESIDENT then turned to the subject of long-term planning, noting that since victory was on the way despite present difficulties, it was urgently important to begin now to make plans for the future. He invited Dr. Lilienthal to speak on what was being done in the post-war planning field.

Dr. Lilienthal stressed the importance of the task. He briefly reviewed the ideas and plans he has blocked out in concert with his Vietnamese colleagues, particularly his counterpart Dr. Vu Quoc Thuc (The GVN's Director of Post-War Planning).

Vu Quoc Thuc replied to Dr. Lilienthal's remarks on behalf of the Vietnamese delegation. He praised Dr. Lilienthal highly and, on behalf of the Vietnamese people and government, thanked The President for making Dr. Lilienthal's assistance available. He noted that he and Dr. Lilienthal had very similar views, which made working together a pleasure. Dr. Thuc explained it was difficult to do post-war planning when one did not know for sure whether to plan in terms of an isolated South Vietnam sealed off from the North or in terms of at least a limited amount of trade and commerce with South Vietnam's northern neighbor. He assured the President that the Vietnamese were working hard to develop responsible programs capable of meeting the needs of the post-war future.

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THE PRESIDENT then took up the subject of inflation and the critical need for land reform.

Mr. Komer called attention to the economic agreements recently concluded with the GVN, which would help in the anti-inflation field.

Mr. Hahn (Governor of the National Bank and recently named Minister of Economy and Finance) replied to Mr. Komer's remarks and assured the President of the GVN's continued cooperation in the all-important field.*

Prime Minister Ky assured the President that the GVN was well aware of the importance of land reform and of pressing further in this area as rapidly as possible. He noted that there were a number of complicated administrative problems, including the fact that Vietnamese law required detailed surveys before titles could be issued and in many areas security considerations precluded making the kind of survey the law requires. He said he had decided to cut through the red tape in this sphere and accept certification by hamlet and village councils that peasants owned given plots of land.

Chairman Thieu closed the session by reassuring the President and his colleagues, including General Westmoreland, that the Vietnamese would concentrate on both the military and the civilian side of the conflict and had every confidence in making continued progress. In these closing remarks, Chairman Thieu referred once more to the Route 9 proposal.

* * * * *

*Mr. Hanh happens to be an old friend of mine. We talked for a few moments just after the Joint Session broke up. During our conversation Mr. Hahn said there were still some technical problems on the topics he had been discussing in Saigon with Mr. Komer but he had not wanted to raise them at the 20 March session.

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Cautionary Comment: The above resumé of the 20 March Joint Session was based on rough notes I scribbled while the session was in progress, amplified by memory whenever I was certain my memory was accurate. These notes were made solely for my use and that of Mr. Helms in refreshing our memories on the topics covered so we could see how the Agency could best deploy its resources in order to support the President's programs. Though the above resumé is accurate to the best of my recollection and belief, it is not complete. In taking these notes, I never intended for them to be used in an attempt to reconstruct the entire proceedings.

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